



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

MEMORANDUM

DATE: September 26, 2008

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council


FROM: Jay Goldstone, Chief Operating Officer

SUBJECT: Mission Bay Unidentified Material

As an update to my earlier memorandum addressing this matter, I am pleased to report that we have been successful in identifying the material washing ashore on Fiesta Island. Today, the Metropolitan Wastewater Department's ocean monitoring boat found a large bed of naturally occurring sponges just off the west shore of Fiesta Island. These sponges match the material that has been found on the beach. We believe that as the sponges die off, pieces break loose and wash ashore. For unknown reasons, this phenomenon appears to have been particularly heavy this year.

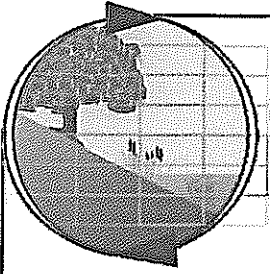
The City also engaged Keith Merkel of Merkel & Associates to investigate the material, independent of the other on-going investigations. The attached letter from Mr. Merkel states that he has also determined the material to be "naturally occurring sea sponge that is found within the warm waters of Mission Bay." He goes on to state that the strong odor from the material is a result of the organic decay of the dead organism and anaerobic bacterial degradation of the material.

The County of San Diego has posted beach closure signage in all areas impacted by this material. We are currently awaiting final bacterial test results for water samples taken on September 25. If the sample results are within the bacterial limits, the closure signage will be removed. If there are areas where bacterial limits are exceeded, the beach closure signs will be replaced with beach advisory signs. We anticipate that this will occur within the next 48 hours.


Jay Goldstone

Attachment: Merkel & Associates, Inc. letter of September 26, 2008

cc: Andrea Tevlin, IBA



Merkel & Associates, Inc.

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September 26, 2008

M&A #08-144-01

Stacey LoMedico
Parks & Recreation Director
City of San Diego
202 C Street, MS 37C
San Diego, CA 92101

Re: Unidentified Blobs on Mission Bay Beaches Are A Natural Sea Sponge

Dear Stacey:

Thank you for contacting Merkel & Associates, Inc. (M&A) this morning regarding the need for identification of the unknown substance washing ashore at Fiesta Island. At your request, I visited Fiesta Island an hour ago where I met with one of the beach maintenance operators who showed me the material in several states of decay and confirmed that the material I reviewed is the same material that has been removed over the past couple of weeks. I determined the material to be a naturally occurring sea sponge that is found within the warm waters of Mission Bay. This particular sponge is quite abundant in the inner portions of the bay and has been present in high abundance for as long as I have been completing marine surveys in the waters. It was even noted to be common in the baywide survey we completed in 1988.

The strong odor from the sponge is a result of organic decay of the dead organism and anaerobic bacterial degradation of the material. Your lack of finding the material to be of a fecal nature is therefore not surprising.

What is interesting about the occurrence is not the sponge itself, but rather the fact that it has washed up on the beach. We trawl this species up quite regularly while conducting surveys and, when live, it naturally sinks when returned to the water. For this reason, it is of greater interest to consider why the sponge is dying in such numbers and washing ashore, a phenomenon that I have not seen before in over 20 years working in Southern California bays and most particularly Mission Bay.

I have attached a few photos of the sponge. I have also confirmed the presence of sponge spicules in the more amorphous mats in order to verify the visual determination. I hope this addresses your needs. Please let me know if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

Keith W. Merkel
Principal Consultant

